

Good afternoon. My name is Kim Rossi, and I have three adult daughters with autism who are in the DDS system. I am a single parent. 2 of my daughters attend a day program at The Kennedy Center in Trumbull.

My youngest is aging out of school in September when she turns 22. She will have a healthy budget through DDS, but she will NOT be able to attend the Kennedy Center with her sisters, because of severe staffing issues. As a non-profit, The Kennedy Center cannot compete with the State pay scale.

Day Service Providers (DSP) for adults with autism need far more skills, flexibility, training and maturity than typical Personal Care Attendants (PCAs.) Kennedy Center DSPs have a difficult job. And their pay is not commensurate with the stress. Gone are the days when a 19-year-old high school graduate would hire on and stay for 5 years, before leaving for higher pay. Applicants DEMAND the higher pay now. Gone are the days when a new employee would "tough it out" for the benefits because they can stay on Mom and Dad's insurance until age 26. The decline in work ethic is no fault of The Kennedy Center, but they are paying the price, by not being able to at least compete with the State on hourly rates.

If Kennedy Center cannot hire and retain quality staff, my daughters suffer. A Day Program is NOT respite. We need men and women who have a calling to work with adults with autism and can make a livable day's pay for a hard day's work.

Level the playing field for non-profits. Or open state run day programs and let the state do the work you have farmed out private agencies and non-profits. And remember, parents are aging too – and we need programming for our loved ones.

Thank you.

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